



Specialist Schools
and Academies Trust
EXCELLENCE AND DIVERSITY

Leadership Mindsets

*Innovation and learning in the
transformation of schools*

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Leading School
Transformation
Series



Chapter I

Moving from sorting to learning – new mindsets required

The education terrain is rapidly shifting and the existing structures and boundaries of schooling are fast eroding. Education is being revolutionized through the Internet, Google, outsourcing and 24/7 demands and expectations. Those organizations destined to be 'great' in the rapidly transforming world will be those adept at generating new leadership capacity to meet the changing demands of global schooling.

Alma Harris (2008, p. 19)

Distributed Leadership: Developing Leaders for Tomorrow

We need leaders to create transformed schools using a new growth mindset: The passion for stretching yourself and sticking to it, even (or especially) when it's not going well, is the hallmark of the growth mindset. This is the mindset that allows people to thrive during some of the most challenging times in their lives. This *growth mindset* is based on the belief that your basic qualities are things you can cultivate through your efforts. Although people may differ in every which way – in their initial talents and aptitudes, interests, or temperaments – everyone can change and grow through application and experience.

Carol Dweck (2006: pp. 6–7)

Mindset: The New Psychology of Success

Frances Stone understands that school leadership is about making a difference in the lives of learners. Whenever she has doubts about the meaning of her

work, she thinks about Justin, Madeline, Anna and Matt. These children are four of six siblings who live with their father in a small northern community. The town has been hit by serious economic downturns. The factory has closed, unemployment is high and positive future prospects for anyone with less than a good secondary education are remote. There was a time not so long ago when a teacher, principal or head teacher at their school might have looked at these children and described them as having 'little hope' and, although perhaps somewhat embarrassed to do so, other educators would have nodded in agreement.

Fortunately these young people attend a school where the teachers and the leaders have a growth mindset, not a fixed mindset, where the staff passionately believes that they can collectively change the life chances of all their learners for the better. Frances and her staff are dedicated to making sure that each of them has a chance for a full rich life – no matter what it takes. Justin, age eight, has dreams of becoming a writer. A university mentor is helping him to believe in his own storytelling gifts and he recently won a young writers' contest. Two years ago, Madeline, age nine, was a struggling reader. Now she is helping younger readers in her role as a reading coach and is further developing her strong social skills as a peer helper. Anna, 12, is working as a volunteer in the school library and is highly regarded by the staff and students for her service orientation and organizational skills. She provides Internet research assistance for adults in the community and she is considering secondary programme choices in languages and international studies. She is studying advanced mathematics on-line through an innovative distance-learning programme connecting talented teachers and learners.

Matt, 17, is involved in an electronic arts apprenticeship programme in a partnership between his high school and the local college. He is also a volunteer emergency responder in his community as part of his service learning work. Only a year ago, Matt was in danger of becoming a 'fade out' in his school. The teachers and his principal refused to give up on him and he responded to their persistent caring. Now he is on his way to a productive future.

These young people are learning and thriving and their school is providing them with the hand-up they need and deserve.

These four young people live in a very different world than their grandparents and parents. Their schooling needs are also very different. The skills their families needed in order to find factory employment and run households are not nearly enough for these four learners who need to thrive in a world of technological complexity and global connectivity. The demands of contemporary society require

that educators rethink many aspects of the school experience, including the roles of informal and formal leaders and the way school leadership generally is conceptualized.

We agree with the arguments proposed by a number of thinkers that the move from an industrial to a knowledge society demands a shift in key assumptions about learning, schooling and leadership. Robert Starratt (2004), for example, contends that the industrial model of the last century developed educational practices that fragmented and trivialized learning and separated school activities from the life worlds of students. Particularly in secondary schools, the truncated class periods, the lack of connection across curricular areas, the absence of ongoing adult-learner relationships and the emphasis on coverage and testing seem increasingly out of step with the interests and needs of young people.

School leaders know that their responsibility for shaping learning for young people is taking place in a rapidly changing economic, social and technological climate. Manuel Castells (2004) describes the impact of these changes:

Globalization and informationalization, enacted by networks of wealth, technology and power, are transforming our world. They are enhancing our productive capacity, cultural creativity and communication potential. At the same time, they are disenfranchising societies. As institutions of state and organizations of civil society are based on culture, history and geography, the sudden acceleration of the historical tempo and the abstraction of power in a web of computers, are disintegrating existing mechanisms of social control and political representation ... people all over the world resent the loss of control over their lives, over their environment, their countries and, ultimately over the fate of the Earth (p. 72).

Learners in today's schools live in this new knowledge world and have access to information, ideas and social connections unimaginable a few years ago. Teachers are wondering how to shift their pedagogy so that today's learners are more engaged in their learning. Experienced, new and potential leaders are wondering about the extent of the educational changes that are required – in curriculum, in organizational structures, in adult staff development and in learning strategies. Does everything need to change, as some argue, or will the community nature of school continue to be an

important and ongoing part of the evolution of society? Is it true that all schooling will be exclusively delivered by technology with access to information, teachers and assessments available any time and anywhere? Will schools become quaint artifacts of a by-gone era?

In this chapter you will consider the changes in key assumptions about the purpose of schools as systems shift away from sorting to a stronger focus on learning. The deeper and more ongoing forms of learning required by the knowledge society have significant implications for school leaders. We believe unequivocally that quality learning for every learner in a more personalized and responsive system is at the core of today's school mission. We argue that a different way of conceptualizing the work of school leaders, through the application of a new combination of mindsets, is required to meet this transformative challenge.

Despite globalization and technological advancements, most young people like Madeline, Justin, Anna and Matt currently attend schools of one type or another for at least part of their day. In schools worldwide, the industrial model of schooling is, sadly, still very apparent. In the industrial model, one of the expected functions of the school system was to sort and rank students, mainly in relation to access to post secondary opportunities. In sorting schools, teaching was understood and indeed rewarded, as covering the formal curriculum and providing opportunities for students to learn. Formal school leaders including principals and head teachers were expected to manage and organize the administrative structures of the school; they could leave the responsibility for teaching to the staff.

The days of learners leaving school with marginal skills and minimal knowledge and being able to participate fully in society are behind us. Simply providing the opportunity for learning is not enough. Comments such as, 'I've done my best to teach them; it's not my problem if they didn't learn' must no longer be heard. As educators it is not only our problem, it is our professional responsibility. In the knowledge society, learning – not sorting – is the key mandate of schools as young people now need and are expected to learn during their school years and throughout their lifetimes. This powerful new expectation for schools and systems requires new conceptions of leadership.

In Table 1.1, we identify four major shifts that are necessary in moving from a sorting system to a learning system. The implications

Table 1.1 Shifting from sorting to learning – implications for systems and learners

Systems Shifting	
From Sorting	To Learning
A focus on instruction and teaching	A focus on deeper forms of learning
Summative assessment for grading and reporting	Formative assessment to provide descriptive coaching feedback and learner self-regulation
Teaching in isolation	Teaching teams working as learning communities
External centralized pressure	Local internalized commitment, capacity building and responsibility

of these shifts will be considered further in this book as we explore the leadership mindsets.

Making the move from a sorting to a learning system involves all educators at all levels shifting from a fixed to a growth mindset. This means that all educators will act in ways that demonstrate their conviction that virtually all young people can learn and achieve at high levels. Jurisdictions around the world are taking very seriously the imperative of increasing high school completion rates as a minimum requirement for accessing a productive place in the knowledge society. This requires a different way of thinking, new forms of teamwork, focused effort, continuous learning and passionate commitment. Shifting mindsets is neither easy nor trivial work. It reflects a profound and significant set of changes. Carol Dweck (2006), a leading researcher in the area of developmental psychology, describes mindset change in this way:

Mindset change is not about picking up a few pointers here and there. It's about seeing things in a new way. When people – couples, coaches and athletes, managers and workers, parents and children, teachers and students – change to a growth mindset, they change from a *judge-and-be-judged* framework to a

learn-and-help-learn framework. Their commitment is to growth and growth takes plenty of time, effort and mutual support. (p. 238)

The sorting system inherent in the industrial paradigm of schooling reflects the fixed mindset with its emphasis on grading and judging. Learning systems require teachers and leaders with growth mindsets in which learning and helping others learn are lifelong pursuits. Other major thinkers agree that our changing world requires new thinking about leadership. Howard Gardner (2007), for example, describes a set of intellectual approaches or leadership minds that he argues are important for contemporary leadership in every field and discipline. Gardner believes that the deeply interconnected world in which we now live requires new capacities that will help leaders be 'better equipped to deal with what is expected, as well as what cannot be anticipated: without these minds, a person will be at the mercy of forces that he or she can't understand, let alone control' (p. 2).

He describes the five required capacities as 'minds'. The disciplined mind has mastered a way of thinking required of the profession. The synthesizing mind can take information from various sources and connect information in ways that make sense for others. The creating mind engages in new and fresh ways of thinking and considers unfamiliar questions. The respectful mind enjoys and learns to work productively with a variety of other people of dramatically different backgrounds and the ethical mind considers how citizens can work together for the greater good rather than just personal self-interest. Gardner (2007) concludes that these five ways of thinking are critical and that they need to work synergistically if we are to successfully meet our contemporary local and global challenges.

Another noted strategic thinker has also been considering mindset changes connected to management practice and management education. Henry Mintzberg (2004) argues that development programmes for business managers have over-emphasized either the science of managing resulting in technocratic calculation or the artistic approach resulting in an 'heroic' style. Mintzberg's studies convinced him of the importance of an engaging and balanced style and he has since worked internationally with other management educators to create a new programme designed around five mindsets. In the reflective mindset, managers learn to reflect on their own experiences

and learn how to become more critically discerning. The analytical mindset emphasizes coming up with an insightful way of framing business challenges. The worldly mindset is about managing context and involves the realization that, even in a deeply interconnected world, that the 'globe is made up of all kinds of worlds' (p. 304). The worldly mindset implies that managers must become more sophisticated, appreciative and practical in working with unfamiliar people and settings. The collaborative mindset involves managing relationships and the Japanese style of leading in the background is valued and explored. The final mindset is about action and managing change and Mintzberg and his colleagues believe that 'the world needs managers who change others by first changing themselves' (p. 310).

The work of Dweck (2006), Gardner (2007) and Mintzberg (2004) has influenced aspects of our thinking about the mindsets for new school leaders. We believe that Dweck's perspective about a growth mindset is important for every educator and especially for leaders as they work to shift their schools in the direction of deep learning and away from an overemphasis on coverage and testing. We have seen the mindsets that Gardner and Mintzberg describe in action in some of the leaders we have observed. The six mindsets we describe in this book have been most directly shaped, however, by our studies of hundreds of new and experienced school leaders in a wide range of schools and communities over the last decade. The most successful of these leaders have been able to transform their schools into centres of deep and ongoing learning.

We recognize that we are thinking about new forms of leadership in a context where school and system transformation is increasingly on the minds of politicians, researchers, theorists, educators, parents and the learners themselves. A useful definition of the transformation required to shift schools and systems from sorting to learning has been proposed: 'We define transformation as significant, systematic and sustained change that secures success for all students in all settings, especially under challenging circumstances, thus contributing to the well being of each and every student and of society' (Caldwell and Spinks 2008, p. 4). Transformation of this significance, demanded by the needs of young learners, poses new and exciting challenges for school leaders. Old solutions to old problems will not work. New mindsets and new forms of expertise are required.

Adaptive expertise required

School leadership would be relatively safe and simple if leaders were only faced with problems for which there were already proven solutions. Hefitz and Linsky (2002) make an important distinction between technical problems for which leaders already have the necessary know-how and procedures and adaptive challenges that cannot be solved by someone who provides answers from above. They call these new problems adaptive challenges because they require experiments, new discoveries and adjustments from numerous places in the organization or community. They suggest, 'without learning new ways – changing attitudes, values and behaviours, people cannot make the adaptive leap necessary to thrive in the new environment' (p. 14).

From their research on learning, Daniel Schwartz, John Bransford and David Sears (2005) have been exploring how to make the development of adaptive expertise a way of life for leaders. They make a case for the importance of both innovation and efficiency in developing adaptive expertise. They argue that efficiency-oriented practice can be understood as 'problem-elimination rather than in-depth, sustained problem solving' (p. 26). They go on to suggest that 'individuals who are optimally adaptive have the cognitive power to rearrange their environments and their thinking as they encounter new problems and novel information' (p. 27).

From their perspective, leaders do need to acquire the kinds of well-organized, fluently accessible sets of skills and knowledge that are represented by efficiency. For school leaders, ensuring that the timetable reflects the best possible use of available personnel, that the budget is balanced and that communication with families is clear and effective are organizational skills reflecting efficiency. Leaders also need an innovative approach that requires a movement away from what is momentarily most efficient for the individual or for the organization. Schwartz, Bransford and Sears (2005) suggest that innovation is often preceded by a sense of disequilibrium that signals that certain processes or ways of thinking, or previously learned routines, are not quite working properly. School leaders determined to make the shift from a sorting to a learning system recognize that the old ways of thinking about school are not working for many learners and they understand that adaptive expertise is needed to develop new solutions to the challenges of increasing both quality and equity.

School leaders also understand that they will have to work through a stage of discomfort and imbalance to make the shift from an emphasis on teaching to a focus on deep learning and to shift from learning for some to learning for all. We have observed that the thinking embedded in the mindsets can assist leaders in developing the kind of adaptive expertise they need to address new problems and develop transformative solutions. Schwartz (2005) and his colleagues describe an optimal adaptability corridor that exists between the dimensions of efficiency and innovation. We would argue that school leaders who embody the mindsets 'live' in this corridor. They understand the need for efficiency and display organizational competence and, at the same time, they are passionately focused on developing innovative practices that will better serve the needs of their learners.

Innovation for system transformation

If we accept Brian Caldwell's (2008) definition of transformation as one of significant, systematic and sustained change aimed at the success of all learners, then we must consider what forms of innovation will help us realize this transformation. We think it is important for school leaders to critically examine the various approaches to change being advocated and to determine what forms of innovation will be most likely to get them to their learning system destination effectively – and with the fewest casualties.

We have been in discussions where policy makers and theoreticians argue for 'blowing up' the old and replacing the industrial model structures as quickly as possible. They want a system that is much more individualized and personalized. With a strong emphasis on choice, technology and technological solutions, their new system is focused on the learner being able to obtain individualized instruction, coaching and virtual tutoring. Personalized learning in this new model is available any time and anywhere for any form of learning needed or desired.

Reflecting the demand for greater personalization and system transformation, David Hargreaves (2003, 2006, 2007) suggests changes in school practices including:

- moving from single to multiple schools and institutions;
- merging age and phase levels so that transitions are more self-paced and seamless;

- creating flexible age groupings where learners of a variety of ages work together rather than in grades;
- constructing a curriculum based on competence and project-based, transdisciplinary approaches;
- combining academic and emotional support through the use of vertical tutoring;
- creating smaller, more intimate groupings within large secondary schools;
- developing learners actively as mentors and coaches for other learners;
- distributing leadership more widely with the adults in the school;
- expanding and systematically developing broader forms of student leadership;
- changing to school-led and school-located initial teacher education and ongoing professional learning – led by educators using peer-to-peer learning and networks with a focus on learning improvement from a whole school perspective.

In the schools we have studied that are moving closer to becoming learning systems, many of these strategies are being used, learning is deepening and learners are benefiting. In addition to changes within schools, there are policy thinkers who are suggesting that leaders focus on working more broadly across schools, levels and community agencies. Valerie Hannon (2007) in her work with the Innovation Unit in England urges policy developers and school leaders to pay much more attention to matters of system leadership where school leaders work collaboratively across schools and with agencies. She notes that in England the context for school leadership is changing fast:

Head teachers today are already taking on the responsibility of leading more than one school; they are co-leading in partnerships and federations; they are leading schools in close collaboration with other agencies, or are providing a range of services themselves, giving children access to much more than education – healthcare for example and other services. Most radically, perhaps, we are beginning to glimpse a future in which the whole idea of 'school' is re-imagined. School leaders are already guiding education beyond school walls, as ICT opens up new possibilities for schooling that needs no 'school'.

(p. 17)

In our own policy development experience we have been in discussions with those who assume as their starting point the ongoing importance of community and personal connections. In British Columbia, for example, literacy advocates are working together across institutions to develop a greater sense of community, stronger coherence and new forms of teamwork. They see schools as central to this work. Advocates such as these see improving the school system in much the same way as the arts community views building on the classical forms of music, art, dance, drama, and opera. Leaders in many arts communities support making art forms accessible to everyone, improving each of the forms using all of what is known and ensuring that changes are made creatively and respectfully. This view of innovation is similar to the studies of positive deviance¹ from the community health field where small yet profoundly important changes make a big difference over time.

Leaders drawn to this perspective are more likely to emphasize learning-oriented classrooms and emotionally supportive school communities. As school and system leaders ourselves, we are chiefly interested in seeing that wise practices are used systemically and that knowledge from both practice and research are connected and put to work immediately for the purposes of deep learning and social justice. We take as a given that some form of community 'school' as a social learning centre will continue to play an important role in building democratic and inclusive societies. Our focus is on ensuring that every aspect of the learning programme, including the learning and teaching strategies selected, reflects the best of current knowledge and practice about learning.

Conclusion

Matt, Anna, Justin and Madeline are in our classrooms today and they, and all other young people, need and deserve to be part of a learning system that will help them learn for a lifetime. We argue that systemically and persistently applying current knowledge about learning, assessment, motivation, inquiry and teacher professional learning – in every classroom and in every school – is in itself a powerful form of innovation. In our exploration of systems around the world we have found very few where there is a systematic focus on comprehensively using the current knowledge base about learning and teaching. Systems that do so are unusual. What is more usual are small islands of knowledge application with bright

lights of innovation surrounded by seas of 'sorting business as usual'.

We agree with Michael Fullan (2006, p. 44), who argues that schools and systems improve when we do what we know works from both research literature and practice and when we do this with greater intensity. We have experienced the positive impact on learning when a school takes a deliberate and sustained approach to improving learning and teaching practices. We have also witnessed the cynicism that occurs when teachers feel burdened by initiative overload and when the focus for improvement efforts or professional learning varies according to the interests of whoever is making the decisions.

As Canadian educators, we are drawn to the forms of change that reflect the best aspects of the credit union movement – a movement that has helped create communities that are generally responsive, socially aware, environmentally active, organizationally sound and financially reliable. We appreciate the credit union blend of strong social connections with more personalized responses embedded in community. We will always seek out those innovations or proposed reforms that are designed to increase both equity and quality because we believe that contemporary school leaders need to work on both goals simultaneously. Leadership creates the conditions in schools where all learners grow, progress, graduate, go on to some form of post-secondary learning and lead productive lives. It is our central belief that regardless of the innovative structures and new forms of schooling that are developed, the strongest forms of schooling will be characterized by trusting relationships and the development of outstanding learning by professionally connected and supported teachers.

In the next chapter, you will meet Alison, a new principal with intense moral purpose working in a small elementary school in a rural community. You will explore this first mindset as you consider the broad purposes of schooling, think about what quality really means, imagine new forms of quality in your context and reflect on how ethics, passion and commitment are at the heart of leadership. You will also consider issues of school identity and sustainability and you will follow Alison's journey as a new school leader doing her best to create quality and equity for learners.

Questions for consideration

- 1 Think about leaders – formal or informal – you respect for the difference they are making to the learning of individuals and to groups of learners within their schools. To what extent do they reflect the growth mindset described by Carol Dweck?
- 2 Shifting schools from sorting to learning systems is central to the new work of school leaders. Think about your own school. In what ways are you making these fundamental shifts? In what areas do you think you need more concentrated effort?
- 3 Education has no shortage of proposed reforms or innovations. *So Much Reform So Little Change* (2008) is the title of a recently published book by American writer Charles Payne. This title is an accurate description in many educational settings because many of us have all too frequently seen well-intentioned reforms founder for one reason or another. Think about the innovations you have seen that resulted in real change in your setting. What conditions led to this success? What are the implications for you as a leader?

Note

- 1 For more information on the application of positive deviance in public health, please see <http://www.positivedeviance.org>.